Nevada Strategic Planning for Statewide Interoperability

Focus Group 4

Las Vegas, NV
June 29, 2005
Follow Up Report

Executive Summary

The Las Vegas focus group session on June 29, 2005 provided valuable input from the state and local practitioner perspective for the development of the Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan. The focus group participants identified the following top four major initiatives to be considered during the upcoming strategic planning session in Las Vegas on September 14, 2005:

(1) Create and organize regional Emergency Services Planning Boards (ESPBs), under the state of Nevada, to create interdisciplinary command courses, centers for emergency response exercises and lessons learned, standardized credentialing for emergency services workers; serve as a resource for policies, procedures, and MOU models; and manage provisional R&D labs to test technical changes

(2) Establish commitment to P25 (or federal grant standards or requirements) through policies, timelines, and funding

(3) Coordinate spending of grant money to make wise purchases based upon proven solutions and strategic plans including holding federal funds at the state level until the solution is proven

(4) Create formalized interoperability advocacy positions in emergency service agencies who will be responsible for administering training exercises

Introduction

The State of Nevada has established a partnership with the SAFECOM Program to conduct a pilot project that will lead to the development of a communications interoperability strategic plan that includes the input of public safety practitioners. SAFECOM's mission is to serve as the umbrella program within the federal government to help local, state, tribal and federal public safety agencies improve public safety response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications. The involvement of local and statewide emergency responders is essential to the success of developing a Statewide Interoperability Strategic Plan. The Nevada Communications Steering Committee (NCSC) serves as the primary point of contact for these efforts.[*]

In order to develop a collaborative Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan, the State has asked SAFECOM to conduct six (6) regional focus group sessions, comprised mainly of informal and formal leaders from fire, law enforcement, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) departments. Additional representation includes public health, local and state agencies in order to accurately capture local perspectives on the state of interoperable communications in Nevada. In addition to the 6 focus group sessions, a strategic planning session will also be conducted to validate and build on the inputs from the focus groups.

The following graphic depicts the process by which SAFECOM will bring locally driven philosophy and strategic planning approach to the regional focus groups and strategic planning session.

Figure 1. Nevada Strategic Planning Process Map

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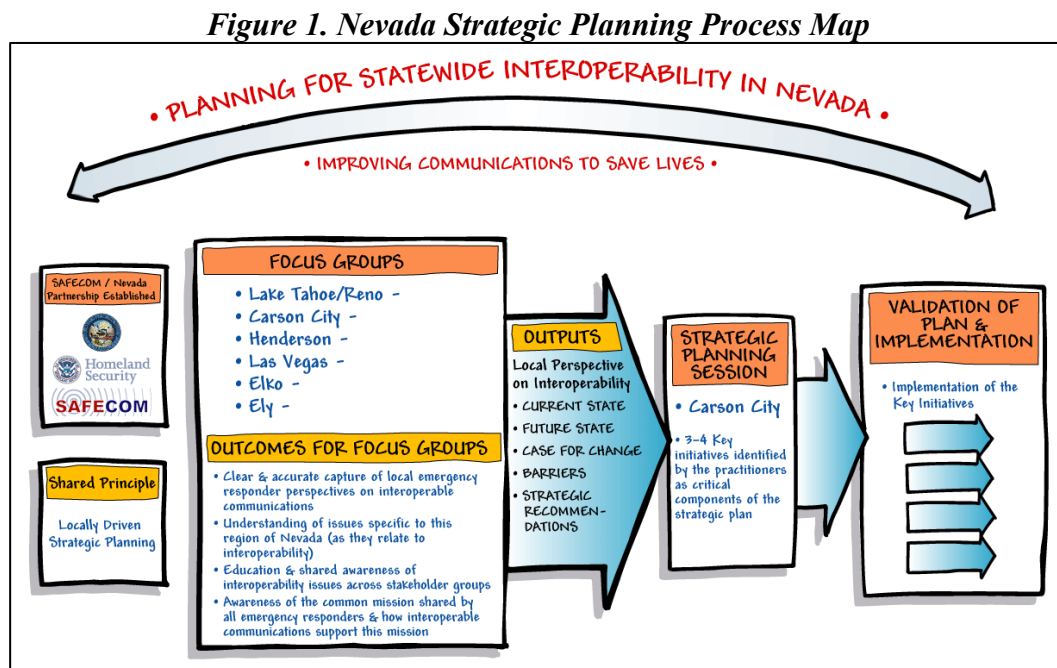
[*] The members of the Nevada Communications Steering Committee (NCSC) who participated in this focus group did so in their practitioner or individual agency role. They did not participate as members of the NCSC. No NCSC deliberations were undertaken, nor decisions made.

The outcomes of the focus group sessions are as follows:

❑ Clear and accurate capture of local emergency responder perspectives on interoperable communications
❑ Understanding of issues specific to this region of Nevada (as they relate to interoperability)
❑ Education and shared awareness of interoperability issues across stakeholder groups
❑ Awareness of the common mission shared by all emergency responders, saving lives, and how interoperable communications support this mission

Each focus group session is designed as a series of conversations centered on the following issues: interoperability (statewide and regional) as it relates to the current state, the envisioned future state, case for why change needs to happen, barriers to achieving the future state, and recommended strategies to pursue.

Detailed Overview

Current State
The objective of the Current State conversation is to affirm the facts about current interoperability capabilities and needs in Nevada regarding response efforts spanning day-to-day operations up through catastrophic events.

The Las Vegas focus group identified the following Current State themes specific to communications interoperability in Nevada:

➢ Technical capabilities are present, but the operational policies, procedures, and agreements to improve interoperability are either not present or under development; interoperability conversations go straight to technology and jump over governance and other operational issues
➢ Communications interoperability is not a priority for agencies – people are asked to work on the issue as a second job with no staff or prioritization support
➢ Currently spectrum rules are prohibitive to interoperability
➢ There are no P25 systems in Nevada; this lack of P25 capabilities or equipment with P25 capabilities has prevented the realization of operational benefits
➢ Many local areas have interoperable capabilities although they are not well-practiced, but it is difficult to include the federal government

- o Bureau of Land Management (BLM) gets left out of communications when Southern Nevada Area Communications Council (SNACC) is involved and has to carry 2 radios
- o The largest federal radio system is the Department of Energy (DOE) system, and they cannot let non-federal entities on the system
- ➤ There is a poor understanding among the policy makers about the appropriate policies and procedures needed
- ➤ There are two principle systems in this area: Metro and SNACC
  - o Metro system operates on a 150 MHz analog system and member agencies collaborate when making equipment purchases
  - o Metro has a permanent patch from Metro to North Las Vegas police
  - o SNACC is a quasi-governmental system with 13 members representing a smaller set of the jurisdictions, but it is not open to private agencies or industries.
  - o Agencies and organizations such as the Clark County School District Police, cities of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas, area hospitals, ambulance services, and fire departments have achieved interoperability benefits through SNACC or have plans for migration to SNACC
  - o Memorandum of Understandings (MOU) and operating procedures still need to be developed for SNACC and there are agencies who are not interoperable with SNACC
- ➤ Fire Marshals and the City of Las Vegas Fire have had one table-top exercise
- ➤ North Las Vegas has to be sole sourced to one vendor because of current system purchases
- ➤ There is an absence of vendors who have been recognized to meet the needs of North Las Vegas, so North Las Vegas has to be sole sourced to one vendor because of existing system purchases
- ➤ The technicians are aware and coordinate well in the region; however, coordination is difficult when there are technical changes and technicians are understaffed
- ➤ Political subdivisions and the state are fiercely independent

Future State
The objective of the Future State conversation is to describe the desired future regarding communications among emergency responders in Nevada.

The Las Vegas focus group highlighted the following elements of the Future State of communications interoperability in Nevada:

- ➤ A standardized system (or linked systems) exists with command and tactical channels, MOUs, operational procedures, and policies across the board between all the agencies
  - o This new system includes: a statewide change control process, a clear understanding of who needs to talk to whom, easy access to the appropriate skills and capabilities needed, improved decision-making capabilities on joint operations, and the appropriate regularly maintained policies and procedures

- Funding is not an issue
- Communications section of the incident management team has an open architecture to create interoperability on the fly by incorporating agencies that were unexpected; disseminating critical information on a common channel to all groups involved
- There is information sharing, collaboration, coordination, and shared understanding of impacts on technology changes in existing systems – agencies cannot modify their system without approval
- There is a multi-jurisdictional emergency service command school for all police/fire/EMS/public works
  - operator policy-maker transition providing functional interoperability with regularly scheduled drills and training on interoperability procedures and policies
- Policy makers are aware and educated on the needs of the public safety community and understand the current state of communications interoperability
- Federal and State leadership provide wide latitude, but with some direction/standards to ensure that all information is compatible and standardized
- There are cross-discipline staff assignments that build personnel capabilities in order to benefit and improve emergency response in a time of crisis
- Training is organized regularly on using equipment and procedures for both day-to-day operations and catastrophic incidents
  - Collaboration between agencies is exercised
- The FCC, or other regulation authorities, have structures in place to facilitate frequency end-users selection of the system used, which then works when needed
  - One button interface intelligent software

Case for Change
The objective of the Case for Change conversation is to discuss the consequences and implications if changes to Nevada's state of interoperable communications do not occur, in addition to the opportunities that may be missed by not changing. The Case for Change statements should appeal to the emotions of individuals and result in action.

The Las Vegas focus group identified the following elements as part of making a Case for Change:

- The future state of Nevada communications interoperability must put people first, ideas next, and equipment last
- The current system works, but it is not ideal and causes us to muddle through crisis events
- Using the lessons learned from 9/11 can prevent future disasters

- There are actions proposed by the members of the public safety community that can be taken immediately and would cost nothing with the appropriate political support
- Investing now in interoperability will:
    - Create complete systems of communications - linked systems or one system
    - Clearly define information standards
    - Improve the effectiveness of the resource allocations
    - Improve service to the public and Nevada's image as a safe and attractive community
    - Increase interoperability capacity and operational effectiveness
    - Lead to enhancements that maximize current capabilities
    - Lead to the development of plans for creating inter-agency awareness
    - Increase efficiency through accurate real-time information sharing
    - Result in less surprises on a day-to-day basis
    - Increase more intra-jurisdictional support and staffing throughout the public safety community
    - Guide the purchase of updated equipment and formation of joint support agreements that will lead to reduced maintenance costs
    - Provide opportunities for greater economies of scale when making purchases
- By coordinating and collaborating, the public safety community will be more responsible with the public's money

Barriers

The purpose of the Barriers conversation is to identify factors hindering the effort to achieve the Future State.

The Las Vegas participants identified the following barriers:

- Low frequency of crises and complacency makes interoperability a low priority
- Fear of making a mistake and being wrong, due to the high cost of failure both politically and financially
- Tendency for jurisdictional independence and resistance to change
- Procurement rules are not compatible among agencies
- Lack of frequency coordination, leadership, and issue familiarity at the state, local, and federal levels
- Heavy investment in current systems creates the feeling of being "painted into a corner"
- Liability costs for collaborating in emergency responses
- There is no easy solution to interoperability, plus culture, egos, and politics slow progress
- System investments are substantial, vendor-driven, and do not allow for strategic partnering and collaboration
- State agencies have made large investments that they are committed to
- Operational tempo is the enemy, and does not allow for strategic partnering and collaboration

➢ Radio technicians are doing a pretty good job right now with band-aid solutions, but these solutions will not survive a big crisis

Strategic Recommendations

The purpose of the Strategic Recommendations conversation is to identify the fundamental strategic initiatives essential to reach the desired future state, including the completion of the statewide plan and identification of the most important initiatives the state can undertake in the short term.

The Las Vegas focus group participants identified the following top four (4) critical initiatives to achieve communications interoperability statewide:

(1) Create and organize regional ESPBs, under the state of Nevada, to create interdisciplinary command courses, centers for emergency response exercises and lessons learned, standardized credentialing for emergency services workers; serve as a resource for policies, procedures, and MOU models; and manage provisional R&D labs to test technical changes
(2) Establish commitment to P25 (or federal grant standards or requirements) through policies, timelines, and funding
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(4) Create formalized interoperability advocacy positions in emergency service agencies who will be responsible for administering training exercises

Next Steps

The outcomes from the 6 regional focus group sessions will drive the upcoming strategic planning session. The key initiatives identified by practitioners across the state will serve as the documented view of the user community detailing their perspective on efforts that will most improve interoperable communications in the State of Nevada. The strategic planning session is scheduled to take place in Las Vegas, Nevada on September 14, 2005.

The SAFECOM/Nevada Partnership is committed to maintaining communications with the participants of each focus group as the planning for statewide interoperability in Nevada progresses. This report details the results of the Las Vegas focus group meeting and was distributed to the participants on Friday, July 8, 2005 (a list of focus group participants is included as Appendix A). In addition, the results of the conversations with all 6 focus groups will be made available to all participants in late July.

Immediate actions participants committed to based on their participation in the focus group include:

➢ SAFECOM will consider the following groups for potential focus group participants at Elko and Ely:

- o Nevada Department of Emergency Management
- o Rural fire
- o Wildlife
- o Federal: Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, and Park Service
- o Prisons

Appendix A

Participants in the June 29, 2005 focus group meeting, in Nevada's Las Vegas Area on Nevada's Strategic Planning for Statewide Communications Interoperability:

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Bill	Tynan	United State Park Service	702-293-8993	bill_tynan@nps.gov
Col. Craig	Wrobelewski	Nevada National Guard	775-887-7891	craig.wroblewski@nv.ngb.army.mil
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Appendix B

Graphical Representation of the Nevada Strategic Planning Process